

# HELPING CHARLIE

BY  
V. D. HYDE

*Boston*  
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HELPING CHARLIE



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A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY

V. D. HYDE



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HELPING CHARLIE

## CHARACTERS

*[In the order of their appearance]*

PHOEBE

MARIAN YOUNGWIFE

HENRI FROIDEVEAU

CHARLIE YOUNGWIFE

## TIME AND PLACE

*New York City, the Present, late in the afternoon of a March day.*

## SETTING

*Parlor in Harlem railroad flat. Door across L. C. corner into hall; also L. with portieres into bedroom. Ri. wall two windows with pier glass between. Gaslog fireplace, with mantelpiece above, across Ri. C. corner. Piano up centre, and box couch at right angles to fireplace. Table with work basket and cardplate on top, and a shelf under top. Rocking chair near couch. Canterbury and bookcase combined, phonograph, chairs, etc., characteristic of moderate circumstances.*



## HELPING CHARLIE

[*As curtain rises the room is in twilight, unoccupied, and the phonograph is playing "Tipperary."*]

Enter PHOEBE L., with a vase full of flowers in one hand, a photograph—evidently just arrived in the mail, as the wrappings are still hanging from it—in the other. PHOEBE is rather tall, stout, rather slatternly, good-looking.]

PHOEBE. (*Placing vase on table, turns on lights, holds picture up and addresses it*) Well, that sure is a pleasant smile, Jakey, considering I'm givin' the flowers you said you picked in the field so early in the mornin' for me to the missus. But they ain't got no smell but green and wet, like all them wild flowers. And anyway she'll appreciate them a lot more'n me—with me it's just that you thought enough to pick 'em. Mr. might bring her home some now and then—but these married men never think! And of course flowers is flowers in March. (*Leans photograph against vase, and begins to pick threads, etc., off floor, puts them on table; each time looks at picture and takes fresh start in her talk*) But why didn't you bring 'em this mornin', you gilly? Then she could wear 'em to the reception—she didn't have a flower for her kearsage, poor thing. Oh-h-h-h! (*Picks up a spool of thread and follows it around in its meanderings, wrapped around chair legs, etc.*) I wish she wouldn't do her writin' and her sewin' here too—how can I keep it decent? Ain't the bedroom or the dinin' room good enough! (*Bumps head as she gets under piano for spool*) Confound it! Shut up—shut up—(*Runs to phonograph*) I can't stand "Tipperary" when I'm mad! (*Spool wound up, she puts*

*it on table—looks at picture*) I don't see how such a pleasant feller as you can be a butcher. Funny, the nicest beaux I've had was two butchers. (*Wind moves windows—a slatty sound like hail*) Boh! Gettin' cold. I believe that's rain. Guess I'll fix the fire. (*Looks at clock*) Why, it's five. She'll be home in no time. (*On knees at grate, fixing gas fire*) What a mercy she took that grand new coat. Awful warm, but I hope she don't hurt it. (*Loud peal at bell—then a number of short sharp peals. She jumps*) There she is now. I'll bet she's had a great time by the way she rings. Guess I'll get my possessions out of here. (*Picks up photograph and scraps, while the bell gives a series of chirpy, light rings. During ringing PHOEBE starts to door L., pauses*) Listen to her—ain't she the joyous one? Say, Jake, would you like me to be like that? You men like the gay innocent kind, don't you? And I wonder if you'd get me clo'es like she has? I bet she made 'em hold their breath with her style, if they are the biggest people in Harlem. (*Sticks picture in apron bib as door bell gives a long ring*) There, she's beginnin' all over again. Gosh, she's got her key, but she would bust if she didn't make me come to the door. (*Starts to L. C.*) Phew! I forgot the water pot. (*Rushes out L. while bell begins on the short sharp peals.*)

*By the time the bell ends the short, chirpy rings PHOEBE returns with a glazed earthen vessel which she hangs on a chain suspended before grate. Starts singing "Tipperary" after fixing phonograph to take up tune where it left off, and exit L. C.)*

(*A moment later enter MARION, L. C. swinging key on finger and joining in the song, as she dances. She is small and slim, her coat is loosened and slipping from her shoulder. PHOEBE follows grinning.*)

MARIAN. (*Removing gloves*) Well, Miss Sourrumples, did I wake you up good and hard? That's why I always ring the bell, I know you're asleep and just getting ready to fall over on your range. Pull down the shades—put

on more light—this is Blind Man's Holiday—make a bigger fire! Let us celebrate!

PHOEBE. (*As she runs around doing as bid*) What kind of a time did you have, Mrs. Youngwife?

MARIAN. Time? Grand! Joyous! Tra la la. I looked as swell as the swellest. Madame Mercier herself—and, you know, Phoebe, she is the richest dresser in our set—had on a new creation from Madame Devenney of Fifth Avenue, while I—well, would you believe, several ladies whispered they liked mine better. One of them asked if it was a Devenney! And I said 'How did you guess it?' And so it is a Devenney—by adoption, ahem!—for her name label is under the arm, with the regulation violet sachet attached. Who would dream that the real mother of the creation is fat little Mrs. McPhee, in a tiny Sixth Avenue flat! (*Laughs, removes wrap, and lays it on piano*)

PHOEBE. (*Admiringly*) You bet! Well, I should say! (*Folds her arms and watches MARIAN as she takes off the hat and fingers it daintily*)

MARIAN. Then take my hat! That too is by a great firm, Vignot-Youngwife. (*Laughs chirpily*) Half the firm lives in Paris, the other in a tiny Harlem flat in New York. They're not even acquainted, but their creations are marvelously alike.

PHOEBE. Don't know what you mean by creation that way, but I'll bet you're right.

MARIAN. Of course, Miss Polly-Wants-a-Cracker. (*PHOEBE laughs and slaps side*) How could they help it when I copied it from a genuine Vignot in Madame Rose's window? And then sewed a genuine head lining in that I found in an old hat when I was rummaging in the basement one day. (*Tickled sort of laugh*)

PHOEBE. Don't I remember that day! You found an old Leghorn and fixed it up for me, and I caught this butcher (*laying hand on heart*) right off with it. Come

on over to the fire, Mrs. Youngwife—ain't it rainin' and cold out? (*Bustles a chair to fireplace*)

MARIAN. Cold? What, with an imported Robinèt on? But even an imported Robinèt will get damp. (*Spreads coat over back of chair*)

PHOEBE. Say, Mrs. Youngwife, don't you ever do that out—you know what I mean. Some snoopy thing that has the *real* kind might get onto it.

MARIAN (*Tossing head*) No danger. They don't know Cheap and Skimpy. They'd never suspect anything when they once saw (*in an affected tone*) "Robinèt et Compagnie" stitched in at the neck. Get onto it! Why, Miss Nincompoop, (*PHOEBE roars again*) it was my wrap that made the greatest sensation! I believe I was the most envied woman there! Positively! Why, Madame Froideveau most—most—well, closely examined it. Seemed quite impressed. I believe she was taking notes—I thought she was what you call snoopy. And she the most elegant and yet the simplest dresser I know!

PHOEBE. (*Soberly*) Say, don't you think, Mrs. Youngwife *she* ought to know better? I'd 'a not let her examine it if I was you. It don't seem's if a woman who always wears the things you're always tryin' to copy, that she wouldn't—

MARIAN. Lots o' things that don't seem possible are so, Miss Raven. (*PHOEBE laughs again*) You can fool people every day, all the time, in everything. Just as easy as easy, Phoebe girl.

PHOEBE. (*Shaking head solemnly*) Well, maybe. But I don't know, Mrs. Youngwife. I couldn't, I'll bet you, because—because—well, tell truth, it don't seem exactly the right thing. It don't just exactly seem wrong, but—it—it don't seem right.

MARIAN. (*Gives a little squeak*) Right thing! Why, what's wrong about it? The idea. I only do it to help my poor husband, and isn't that a right motive? (*PHOEBE nods her head at each sentiment through speech*) Doesn't

he work night and day for success? And who would believe he was making any progress if they knew I got my clothes from McPhee and Cheap and Skimpy, those I didn't manufacture myself? (PHOEBE *opens lips to speak*—MARIAN *runs to her, puts arms over shoulders and hands over mouth*) No, no, Miss Croaker (PHOEBE *roars*) not another word. Don't you know that the end justifies the means?

PHOEBE. (*Taking hands from her mouth, and patting them gently*) Well, I don't know. Our priest says—

MARIAN. Tut, tut! No, no, not another word, you Gorgon! (PHOEBE *roars*) When, by a simple device that hurts nobody, I can aid my good little husband to appear very prosperous, in receipt of a big income, I think it my sacred duty to do so, small obstacles to the contrary notwithstanding. He deserves it. He would be far ahead of where he is if he didn't refuse to aid in fraud and wrong-doing by being a corporation lawyer. (*Holds up her head proudly, struts up and down*)

PHOEBE. I don't just know what is a corporation lawyer, but I do know—

MARIAN. Now, now, now, Miss Praise-God-Barebones! (PHOEBE *roars again as MARIAN rushes at her and covers her mouth again*) Consider the artistic, economic and wifely pleasure you would deprive me of. See now! (*Steps back, poses like demonstrator*) I go down Sixth Avenue to a regular Monday morning sale, I pick out a wrap that is fairly stylish and uncommon, I bring it home. I rip out the name of Cheap and Skimpy—or whoever it is—snip-snip! (*Imitates scissors*) I stitch in the name of Robinèt et Compagnie—swish, swish, (*Imitates drawing thread*) I take off a button here, press a plait or two in a different direction there, let out a mistaken tuck, and hey! presto! see a creation by a leading mantua maker of Paris! Really, Phoebe, you go to too many masses to appreciate my genius! and I shall exercises that genius

to ignore your moral lecture! (*Runs to table*) Who brought these lovely crocuses?

PHOEBE. My butcher boy. Not the feller that brings me the candy. This'ns mighty artistic, if he is only a butcher. I'm sorry the gilly didn't bring 'em in time for you to wear to the reception.

MARIAN. Oh, you cute dear! I couldn't exactly wear crocuses to a reception—they won't stay put! But I love them. (*Kisses them daintily*) They always seem to long for the cool green woods. But for that I'll make you a—ur—a Madame Paquin spring hat! (*Parades up and down*) With—ur—crocuses on.

PHOEBE. Why, how would they stay put, as you call it. Wouldn't they wither right off?

MARIAN. Very true, that's why I should not sew them on, Innocent! I mean the crocuses I wore on my last spring hat.

PHOEBE. Oh, thank you. And for me, you can leave off the Madam Pickin part.

MARIAN. Well, we'll see. As it's for you, not for me. Oh, Phoebe, you should have seen Dr. Smith's wife. She raised her brows—just like that! and said she hadn't been able to get a Robinèt since she was married, although she wore nothing else before. Said she was sorry her husband was not a lawyer, instead of a doctor. Mean thing! And she looked real—real—

PHOEBE. Unbelievin', the stinker! But maybe she suspected! I'll tell you its risky—don't go too far, don't, Mrs. Youngwife. My butcher always says about them things "'tis a game not worth the candle!"

MARIAN. What! The game of pushing your husband isn't worth *any* candle? Phoebe bird, you'll not make the butcher a good wife—I'll wait for him and put a flea in his ear. (*PHOEBE roars*) La la la. I think I'll put my slippers on, my feet hurt. Oh dear, these cheap swell boots! Phoebe sweet, get me my slippers. (*Limps to sofa, sits down, begins to unlace shoes, with groans*)



PHOEBE. (*Laughs, starts for bedroom L.*) Well, if my butcher let me do that for him, I'd not make him a wife at all. (*Exit PHOEBE as MARIAN pretends to throw shoe at her. Bell rings*)

MARIAN. (*Yawning*) There's Charlie. He's early. (*Raises voice, speaks down L.*) Phoebe, Phoebe, touch the button in the kitchen, there's Mr. Youngwife. (*Pulls off shoe—pretends to fall over. Sits up, pulls off other shoe, falls over again*) Oh-h-h-h! (*Sits up, rubs feet together as she says reflectively*) Humph! Imagine Phoebe lecturing me on such a subject, Phoebe who breaks my china and hides it away; and puts my gilt dishes into hot water and says she don't know how the gilt came off! Well, virtue is a funny thing, a perfect chameleon taking on the color of the party who's wearing it. Risk! Why there isn't any. Its all to the good. I've got several clients for Charlie just by dressing well. He said so himself. So it makes people think the darling's a prominent and rising attorney. And so he is! Hurrah! (*Jumps up*) All's fair in Love and—yes, this is WAR. War against Failure! Phoebe, I say, Phoebe, where are my slippers? (*Stands on one foot. Bell rings again*) Guess I'll get them when I go after them. (*Exit L. bedroom*)

PHOEBE. (*Appearing L.*) That don't sound like his ring.

MARIAN. (*Poking head in between portieres*) Say, Phoebe, that isn't he—who can it be? Is everything all right? There! somebody's at the hall door—go let him in, and get his name for me, now mind. (*Disappears. PHOEBE disappears L. C. In a few moments enter MARIAN in slippers and pretty negligée, putting finishing touches to toilet.*)

MARIAN. Wonder who it is? Hope it's nobody to dinner, for I've only got the remains of that old pork roast— (*Door L. C. opens, PHOEBE ushers in a tall, foreign-looking man*)

PHOEBE. Mr. Fraud-oh. (*Shrugs her shoulders back of him, as he steps into room. PHOEBE outside closes door. FROIDEVEAU smiles amusedly and bows profoundly*)

FROIDEVEAU. Do I see Madame Youngwife?

MARIAN. I am Mrs. Youngwife. Will you be seated at the fire? You must be damp.

FROIDEVEAU. Ah-h-h-! no, thank you, Madame, the rain is passing. I shall perhaps be so speedy it will not be necessary to be seated.

MARIAN. But my husband is not home, and I suppose it is he you wish to see. If you will be seated, I will get you the paper, and you will not wait long.

FROIDEVEAU. Ah-h-h-! No, no, no, Madame, it is not Monsieur I wish to see. I wish to see Madame herself, and it is true it will only take a short time. I hope Madame will not be offended at a slight question I would ask her.

MARIAN. Offended at a slight question? How could I be so foolish? (*He looks about the room stealthily as they speak. Both smile*)

FROIDEVEAU. Ah, surely, as Madame says, what could I ask that would offend her? (*Sees wrap on back of chair*) Surely nothing in reason. And it is to protect her after all.

MARIAN. You really pique my curiosity, Mr. . . . ah, Fraudow. Is it anything in connection with my husband? (*Anxiously*)

FROIDEVEAU. Oh, no, no, no, my dear Madame. Something of much less import, I assure you.

MARIAN. (*Laughing nervously, noting his glance*) Yes, but what? You get more mysterious.

FROIDEVEAU. (*Goes to wrap, touches it,—courteously but earnestly*) My dear Madame, is it proper that I should ask where you purchased this wrap?

MARIAN. (*Troubled*) But, my dear sir, how can that interest you?

FROIDEVEAU. I fear, ah, Madame, it is hard to tell a



lady, and such a one, a friend of the estimable Madame Mercier, my relative, how can I tell her it is— a sham! (*Whips wrap from chair back, flirts it open, drapes it against him like a salesman displaying wares*) Behold!

MARIAN. A sham! Sir, I do not know what you mean, or what brought you here, or why I listen to you. Please—

FROIDEVEAU. Ah, do not be angry, my dear Madame. My wife, she was at Madame Mercier's reception this afternoon—she is a niece of Madame's—and there a lady took ill—

MARIAN. Mrs. Black.

FROIDEVEAU. And my wife accompanied Madame Black to the room for her wrap, and picked up this one by mistake. Before she laid it down she perceived the name label. I will tell Madame (*Reaches card*) that I am the New York representative of Robinèt et Compagnie, now for ten years, as long as I am married; and my wife knows their goods as well as I myself. My wife says the coat is a sham.

MARIAN. Sir!

FROIDEVEAU. Ah, believe, my dear Madame, you have been most miserably deceived. Let me but know the firm that has committed such a crime, and Madame shall have it made good to her, as well as that the firm shall be most miserably punished.

MARIAN. (*Boldly, but watching door for CHARLIE'S coming*) Why, how could you undertake to make such a statement?

FROIDEVEAU. Ah, Madame, but look! The bad finish. M. Robinèt would weep to see his name within. And the lining—so cheap! And the name-label—machine-stitched, while we keep expert needlewomen to embroider them in.

MARIAN. Indeed! Quite unusual.

FROIDEVEAU. Finally, Madame, we do not use this cheap grade of broadcloth for such style garment. Ah, such a sham!

MARIAN. It is too bad. I hate shams. (*Looks at door anxiously*)

FROIDEVEAU. But, Madame will tell me from where she has bought it?

MARIAN. Really—

FROIDEVEAU. Only for my own use, Madame, for I have no doubt this will not come into court.

MARIAN (*Terrified*) Into court? Oh dear, no. Wait, please, till my husband—

FROIDEVEAU. It is quite unnecessary, my dear Madame, you have only to tell me where you bought the wrap. Then I go to the rascal, terrify him with threats, he promises to never again usurp the name of Eugene Robinèt et Cie., he gives me your money back,—and— all's well that ends well! (*Folds wrap contemptuously, drops it on piano*)

MARIAN. (*Trembling*) But I think you had better wait till my husband comes home. I will tell him all about it, and—

FROIDEVEAU. But Madame—

MARIAN. (*Coaxingly*) You know he is a lawyer.

FROIDEVEAU. Ah, Madame is so innocent, she does not understand. Let me tell Madame the fellow is a swindler, a thief, he misrepresents his goods, he takes people's money on false pretenses—

MARIAN. (*Murmurs, scared*) Yes, sir.

FROIDEVEAU. He occupies a business, yes, a social position without merit—

MARIAN. Yes, sir.

FROIDEVEAU. People think of the rascal as of more consequence than his superiors!

MARIAN. Indeed, yes.

FROIDEVEAU. As if he were Eugene Robinèt.

MARIAN. Yes, yes.

FROIDEVEAU. So now Madame understands.

MARIAN. (*Timidly*) But why does it matter, Mr.

Froideveau? Why should the man not be ambitious—is it a crime?

FROIDEVEAU. (*Rolling eyes, groaning*) Ah, Madame, hélas! Madame is as innocent as an infant. It is delicious. See, Madame. (*As if she were a child*) The law then is very severe, it punishes with fine, with imprisonment, such false pretense. When a man with years of labor and hardship has built up a name for excellence of workmanship and for integrity, then along comes a fellow who cares not how cheap his goods may be, or how little he keeps his agreements with his creditors: he steals the other man's name and business, and poof! all the fine reputation is gone!

MARIAN. Yes, sir.

FROIDEVEAU. And this man's name, Madame?

MARIAN. (*Faintly*) I—I forget—that is—I—

FROIDEVEAU. Ah, Madame, do not shield him—what price did Madame pay?

MARIAN (*Falters, almost weeping*) Indeed, I do not remember. I rather think it was my husband—

FROIDEVEAU. (*Springing forward*) Ah, I see, Madame's husband bought it. Poor man, he could be deceived, whereas Madame would perhaps examine. See now, dear Madame, a wrap like this was meant to be, would be by Robinèt valued at not less than \$100, perhaps more. (*He takes wrap again to examine. She is almost fainting and turns to walk to couch. He folds wrap neatly, lays it in shelf under top of table. She drops into rocking chair.*)

FROIDEVEAU. But Madame is ill with chagrin. Madame must not be troubled. She will tell me the name. I will go, perhaps enter suit, if they will not be reasonable and Madame shall not perhaps appear at all.

MARLAN. (*Faintly*) I think—I believe it was Rosenblatt, on Broadway.

FROIDEVEAU. What! Rosenblatt! Strange! How-

ever, if Madame will give me her husband's business card—

MARIAN. Oh, certainly! (*Jumps up eagerly, runs to cardplate on table, brings card, drops into chair weakly*)

FROIDEVEAU. Ah, thanks, Madame, I go. Rest assured, Madame shall have as little trouble as possible. Good day, Madame, good day. (*Walks toward door L. C. She rises.*)

MARIAN. (*Faintly*) Good day, Mr. Froideveau. My husband will know what to do.

FROIDEVEAU. Ah, without doubt, Madame. Compose yourself. (*Bows himself out of room. She listens till she hears hall door close, then she drops into chair and begins to wail loudly. PHOEBE runs in L.*)

PHOEBE. (*Half crying*) Goodness gracious, Mrs. Youngwife, what's the matter?

MARIAN. Oh, that dreadful man.

PHOEBE. Who was he? What did he want?

MARIAN. He wanted the name of the firm that made my wrap.

PHOEBE. For goodness sake, how awful!

MARIAN. Oh, he is an agent, oh, oh!

PHOEBE. Oh, is that all? I thought it was the feller that made the real ones.

MARIAN. Goose! He says he is Robinèt's representative, that's the people I say made the wrap. Oh-h-h-h!

PHOEBE. Lordy me! It's come at last. Gracious goodness. (*Pauses scared. Then brightens up*) But see here, you mustn't carry on so. He can't do anything—what can he do? How did he find out?

MARIAN. Oh, oh, he is Madame Froideveau's husband—the woman I said seemed to be taking notes about my coat. Oh-h-h!

PHOEBE. I guess you were right all right. Well, I told you so.

MARIAN. Shut up, if that's all the—

PHOEBE. That's so. I ought to be ashamed. It's cold

comfort to say "that's so." Poor girl, and all you wanted was to look beautiful and help your husband. I wonder what he can do. There, there, don't cry so. We must think. Does Mr. Youngwife know anything about your doing this, ma'am?

MARIAN. (*Looking up with tears in eyes.*) Why, idiot, how dare you ask such a thing! Why—why, my husband would *die* before he'd ch-ch-ch—oh dear, I guess it is cheating, that man said so! Phoebe, Phoebe, you said *you* wouldn't ever do it, why did you—let me—do it? A fine girl you are to—to (*Sobs*)

PHOEBE. (*Compassionately*) There, there's a dear, I couldn't stop you; you know I did say something against it. I don't believe you'd a stopped for Mr. Youngwife himself—

MARIAN. (*Jumping up, acting hysterically*) Oh, oh, he'll pound me black and blue, oh!

PHOEBE. (*Giggling*) Just imagine a gentleman that's kind even to the cat, and just worships you, pounding you black and blue, he! he! Come on, cheer up. We'd better tell him right away.

MARIAN. I won't—Never! He'll leave me—he'll get divorced. Oh, a nice friend you not to insist on my stopping—haven't I always been a friend to you?—

PHOEBE. But I'm only your housemaid—and you always tell me to shut up when I say what you don't want to hear. What did the feller say—try and tell me. Maybe I can think of something.

MARIAN. He said—oh, I'll be disgraced forever and ever. He said it was awful—said the firm that sold it to me with the Robinèt name in were *swindlers!* (*Scream*)

PHOEBE. (*Reflectively*) That's what I'd think if there was such a firm!

MARIAN. Shut up! You always say the wrong thing! And he's gone down to Mr. Youngwife's office. Oh-h-h!

PHOEBE. Now, the *devil* will be to pay. I think it would have been awful much better if you'd told your

husband instead of him. Come on, get ahead of the old Frenchy and let your husband know all about it. Shall you or me telephone?

MARIAN. (*Jumping up excitedly*) Sure enough. That's the thing. (*Rushes from room L.*)

PHOEBE. (*Hand to head*) Here's a pretty how-de-do. Wonder where that coat is—better get it out of the way. (*Hunts for wrap*)

MARIAN. (*Rushing in*) I can't—I can't do it. I can't say it over the 'phone! I feel like confessing murder—oh-h-h!

PHOEBE. Maybe I can do it. Don't carry on so—lots of folks 'has done worse'n that! Murder, f'rinstance! (*PHOEBE exit L., MARIAN screaming after her*)

MARIAN. No, don't. Mind your own business, Phoebe Busybody! Don't meddle in other people's affairs. Oh-h-h!

PHOEBE. (*Back at portieres*) Then do it yourself—I'm sure I don't like the job. I'll go out of the flat while you talk to him—but you mustn't waste time. (*PHOEBE enters, starts out of hall door L. C.*)

MARIAN. Where, oh, where are you going? You—you wouldn't desert me (*Voice rising hysterically*) in my trouble!

PHOEBE. Oh, no, I was only running away from fambly secrets—I'll do that every time!

MARIAN. Oh, Phoebe, dear, dear Phoebe, go and do it for me. Do it gently—as—has ki-indly as— (*Sobs*) just speak of the agent—don't say I did it.

PHOEBE. (*Affectionately*) No, I won't, bless your poor heart. It's many a waist and hat you've fixed me. (*Exit L. MARIAN sobs and murmurs contritely*)

PHOEBE. (*As she enters L.*) You're in luck, so spruce up. That feller has a car, I'll bet, for he got there just as I finished talking. I heard him asking for Mr. Young-wife, just as I said, "What'll she do?" And he hung up.

MARIAN. (*Springing up wildly*) I've thought of something—I'll rip the name of Robinèt out of the—



PHOEBE. Too late. He's seen it all right.

MARIAN. (*Looking on piano*) Why, it isn't here! Oh, he has taken it away with him.

PHOEBE. Why, what on earth would he want with it!

MARIAN. For evidence—for evidence. Oh, oh! (*Sobs, throws herself on couch*)

PHOEBE. Oh, I don't know. He seemed a real gentleman, I'm sure he'd ast you first. Well, I must go and 'tend to my dinner or it'll be late. (*Exit L. leaving MARIAN sobbing quietly.*)

(*Curtain for a minute, to represent the lapse of half an hour. When the curtain rises, the door bell is ringing.*

PHOEBE *enters L.*)

PHOEBE. Mebbe that's him come back. Spruce up now and don't let on. (*Starts toward door L. C.*)

MARIAN. (*Starting from couch*) Oh, oh, don't let him in.

PHOEBE. All right, but mebbe 'taint him. (*Doorbell rings louder.*)

MARIAN. Oh, oh! (*Savagely*) Why don't you answer the door, girl?

PHOEBE. All right.

MARIAN. (*Gurgling despairingly*) Wa-wait, oh, wait till I think. Is it Mr. Youngwife, do you suppose?

PHOEBE. Don't know. Might be.

MARIAN. Oh, go quick. Why don't you open the door when I tell you? (*PHOEBE exits, L. C. Returns presently L. C., loud whisper*)

PHOEBE. It's just a message from Mr. Youngwife, ma'am. Here, I got it from him—said you were sick. (*Hands envelope to MARIAN. MARIAN sobs as she opens and reads. Wrings hands, flings letter from her*)

MARIAN. Oh, oh!

PHOEBE. He's waitin' for an answer. (*PHOEBE picks up message and reads*) Oh, you *have* to send an answer. Come, wake up—wake up. (*Shakes MARIAN gently*)

MARIAN. I won't go, I won't go. What can they want of me! Oh, oh.

PHOEBE. Oh, your husband wouldn't send after you if there was any danger.

MARIAN. Do you suppose that dreadful Froideveau took a policeman to the office with him? Char—my husband would expect I could explain all right. Oh, oh, oh. (*Sobs and paces up and down*)

PHOEBE. Now, look here, ma'am, you're gettin' into a condition like—like a—a murderer—ur—ought to. I'll go out and ast the boy. And you be gettin' some backbone in you. (*Exit L. C. MARIAN stands tense waiting for PHOEBE. PHOEBE returns L. C.*)

PHOEBE. He says the Frenchy feller is with Mr. Youngwife, but they ain't any policeman. They was laughin' and smokin'. Got your message ready?

MARIAN. Oh, oh. Go and ask him if it is raining out yet.

PHOEBE. Why, what's that got—(*Rolls eyes, throws up hands, exit L. C.*)

PHOEBE. (*Returning door L. C.*) He says it is some. He wants his message.

MARIAN. I don't know what—ask him if he likes crocuses.

PHOEBE. No, I won't neither, he'll think I'm crazy. He wants his message.

MARIAN. (*Tearfully*) Oh, Phoebe, do take him some—some flowers—put 'em in his buttonhole—be a long time. I—I'll write the note, only give me time. You know how to jolly any man, oh, Phoebe, keep him busy! (*Sobs*)

PHOEBE. (*Flattered, takes a few flowers*) Well, hurry, don't be long. (*Exit L. C. MARIAN runs to desk, with sobs, wiping nose and sighing, writes desperately. PHOEBE returns, pulls note from under her hand*)

PHOEBE. Can I see—um—um. All right. Dress quick's you ever did in your life. (*Exit L. C. talking—MARIAN*



*exit L. face in handkerchief. PHOEBE returns L. C. MARIAN calls from within)*

MARIAN. Find my wrap, Phoebe. I've nothing else to wear.

PHOEBE. (*Hunting*) Better wear your last year's wrap. I certainly wouldn't wear this'n. Besides, I can't find it.

MARIAN. He put it on the piano, I saw him. I won't wear that three-year old coat, *now*.

PHOEBE. (*Hunting*) There you are now. You won't never take any advice. I can't find it. I guess you'll have to wear your last year's or mine. Mine's older, but a fine lady gave it to me and it's some style—or it was one day. I'll get it. (*Hurries out L. C. Enter MARIAN L.*)

MARIAN. Oh! Phoebe's coat. Well, the wages of deception is to wear—ugh! what do they wear in the penitentiary! (*Shudders. Enter PHOEBE with large old-fashioned wrap. MARIAN takes it and examines with wry face*)

MARIAN. Humph! I'll try my medicine. (*Tries on dolman, parades before glass*) It's all up, Phoebe. I've suddenly thought—I can't go. And I'm not sorry—between your coat and my old coat I would as leave go to the Pen! (*Throws PHOEBE'S coat to her with a shudder*) You see, I haven't a garment on that hasn't a wrong mark.

PHOEBE. Well, they ain't goin' to strip you.

MARIAN. How do you know? They do those things in the police court. (*Laughs nervously*)

PHOEBE. Well, and what would Mr. Youngwife be doin' while they were searchin'? You'd better get down to solid facts and think what you'll do when the pinch comes.

MARIAN. (*Trembling*) Oh, oh. Do you think the pinch will come?

PHOEBE. Come on now, sit down. If you ain't goin', what'll I go tell him?

MARIAN. But suppose—suppose my husband was so

sure I'd make it all right that—Oh, Phoebe, you have no imagination.

PHOEBE. Glad I haven't if this is the way it carries on. Are you goin' to go?

MARIAN. Oh, I can't, I can't.

PHOEBE. All right. I'll go tell him you're sick and can't come.

MARIAN. (*Meekly*) Yes, thank you, Phoebe. (*Exit PHOEBE L., MARIAN cries quietly. Enter PHOEBE with wet towel*)

PHOEBE. Now, for the Lord's sake, please, Mrs. Youngwife, hush up, or you'll go crazy. You're lookin' that haggard and old (*MARIAN screams, jumps up, goes to glass*) you can't go to no reception for a week. (*Pushes MARIAN back in chair, wraps towel around her head*)

MARIAN. Oh, look out, it's all wet. (*Flings towel across room, weeping*)

PHOEBE. (*Arms akimbo*) Well, that's what I brought it for. I guess a dry towel wouldn't be much good.

MARIAN. And don't speak to me of receptions. I'll never, never dress respectably again or go to any more affairs, I swear! (*Hand up*) Oh-h-h-h!

PHOEBE. I wouldn't, if you ain't goin' to dress respectable any more! (*Picks up towel, stands a moment looking at MARIAN, exit resolutely L. Door slams—bell rings—door slams again. MARIAN is frightened, jumps up to hide.*)

MARIAN. Oh, they're coming. But they shan't find me! (*Opens box couch. Enter PHOEBE*)

PHOEBE. What are you a-doin'?

MARIAN. I thought somebody—I thought they were coming, and I was—I heard doors and bells, and bells and doors. Oh, dear!

PHOEBE. You heard the telephone and the kitchen door a-slammin'. Fix yourself up, he's a-comin' out here.

MARIAN. (*Screams*) What—who—where? Oh, hide me, hide me. Did you say—

PHOEBE. (*Doggedly*) Yes, I said he was comin' and bringin' Mr. Fraddyoh too.

MARIAN. (*With composure of desperation*) All right. Loan me that wrap, Phoebe. I won't be home.

PHOEBE. Yes, you will. It's rainin', and they won't believe a sick woman went out.

MARIAN. I'll go to bed.

PHOEBE. All right. That's where they'll expect to find-you.

MARIAN. I'll hide in the wardrobe—in the bathroom. I won't see anybody.

PHOEBE. Yes, I would, so they'll know you did it. Shame your husband.

MARIAN. (*Throwing herself on couch*) Oh, Phoebe, how hard-hearted you are. If you were I, what would you do—what would you do? Would you kill yourself? (*Sits up looking rather cheerful*)

PHOEBE. Now, that's natural—you're comin' to your senses. Why, I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd just make a clean breast of it. In the end that'll be the best thing.

MARIAN. (*Starting up in horror*) What? Confess?

PHOEBE. If that's what you call it. It'll take about two minutes, and ain't anything they'd send you to jail for, I don't believe. Anyhow, you got a lawyer in the family. And think how good you'll feel afterwards. Why, it ain't anything. It's like, will you have a achin' tooth pulled or won't you? I'd say every time—pull away!

MARIAN. (*Falls back on couch*) Oh-h-h-h!

PHOEBE. You know 'tain't just right anyhow. Mr. Youngwife'd hate it, don't you think? And the longer it lasts the worse it gets to be found out. Just make up your mind. (*Starts to go out L.*)

MARIAN. Where are you going? Don't leave me alone, don't—oh-h-h-h! (*Sobs, beats couch pillow*)

PHOEBE. That dinner needs some attention, I know. And you can make up your mind as well alone as me

bein' here. (MARIAN sits up, sobs. When PHOEBE gets to portieres she says jerkily)

MARIAN. I suppose—for your sake—I ought to—tell!

PHOEBE. Oh, Lord, no! Don't consider me at all. My conscience ain't hurtin' me. Your doin' wrong don't faze me. Tell for your own sake. (PHOEBE bursts into loud laughter, throws apron over head, exit L.)

MARIAN. (Woebegone) Oh-h-h-h! (Bell rings. She screams softly) There they are. (Jumps up, looks around for escape)

PHOEBE. (A few moments later, outside door L. C.) She's right in the parlor, and in a bad way. She's that upset—and keeps talkin' about—well, sounds like—like police! You must be very gentle with her, Mr. Youngwife.

MARIAN. (Shaking finger at door L. C.) Phoebe, you'll get your walking papers for that as soon as they go—police indeed! Oh-h-h-h! (Steps at hall door, L. C. MARIAN, with little scream pitches headlong on couch, and curls up with a long moan. Enter YOUNGWIFE, followed by FROIDEVEAU, the latter with package under arm. PHOEBE holds door L. C. ajar)

CHARLIE. Why, Marian dear, what's the matter with you? You were well this morning?

FROIDEVEAU. (Rubs hands together, coughs and hides smile with hand) I fear I frightened Madame, poor child. I beg—

CHARLIE. Come, my love, what's the matter? All Mr. Froideveau wants is to know where and how you got your wrap. I told him you would be glad to tell him all about it. I wouldn't let him go to Rosenblatt till I had seen you—they are clients of mine, dear—

MARIAN. (Screams) Oh, clients—clients, Charlie?

CHARLIE. Yes, and a very prominent firm, dear. There must be some mistake! (Puts his arm about her and raises her up) Are you quite sure you got the coat at Rosenblatt's?

MARIAN. (Sobbing) Some mistake—some mistake!

(PHOEBE comes in L. C. slowly—catches MARIAN's eyes, shakes head. Places chair for FROIDEVEAU)

CHARLIE. Ah, a mistake. He did not represent it as a Robinèt, is that it, dear?

FROIDEVEAU. But my dear Youngwife, the rascal has our name stitched in.

PHOEBE. Ahem!

CHARLIE. Are you very sure it is not a Robinèt coat, Froideveau?

PHOEBE. Ahem!

FROIDEVEAU. (*Rising, opens his package, throws a coat similar to MARIAN's over the back of a chair*) Behold a Robinèt! (*Runs to table, gets MARIAN's coat, spreads on back of another chair*) See, compare! This is one of our cheapest—\$125. (*MARIAN screams, rolls hysterically on couch.*)

PHOEBE. So that's where the coat was!

FROIDEVEAU. Compare, ladies (*Politely includes PHOEBE, who is flattered. PHOEBE and YOUNGWIFE gather around him as he expatiates, MARIAN sits up, listening wildly*) In this sham Robinèt the seams are bound, in the real one the lining is made separate and then attached to coat. The plaits in ours are all embroidered down, and the name label embroidered in; in this one it is all done by machine, bah! Ah, what do I see? An old name-label—at least five years old! We use different ones now, see? (*MARIAN falls over on couch with slight scream. PHOEBE looks, nods*)

CHARLIE. Sure! Even a tyro—that's me—can see the difference.

FROIDEVEAU. (*Coughs and covers mouth*) Ah, Madame, the rascal has deceived you sadly. I am enraged. I will punish him severely.

PHOEBE. Ahem!

CHARLIE. Be sure of the firm, darling. There is a fine, and term of imprisonment for such bold misrepre-

sentation! (MARIAN sobs dryly—rises from couch—PHOEBE goes over, comforts her)

MARIAN. I—oh, how can I tell it. Charlie, you will hate me, and the agent will mock at me and perhaps arrest me. I—I—oh, I stitched the name in myself! (*Almost screams*)

CHARLIE. What, you?

MARIAN. Yes, I found the label: I bought the coat at Cheap and Skimpy's on Grand Street, and I—I— (*Breaks off in choking sobs. PHOEBE hugs her*)

CHARLIE. Oh! (*Puts hands under coat-tails, stalks away from couch*)

MARIAN. I did it to help you. I had to dress well. People will not have a lawyer who isn't prosperous—and—and— (*Breaks down again—PHOEBE kisses her and hugs her*)

CHARLIE. And they will drop him when they find to what he owes his prosperity.

FROIDEVEAU. (*Arms akimbo*) Madame! I am devoured with respect for your talent. For your devotion! Ah, sir, let me congratulate you that you have a beautiful wife so devoted to—to—your welfare, that she will lay herself open to the law to aid in your success!

MARIAN. (*Sobbing*) Oh, that isn't the only time! I might as well confess while I am at it. I've done it often! I'm always doing it— (CHARLIE pauses—throws up hands) I have scarce a garment that isn't marked wro-o-o-ong! (*Almost screams*).

PHOEBE. She couldn't see anything wrong in it, poor little thing.

FROIDEVEAU. Ah, Madame, see! When a firm by long years of hard work and expensive advertisement gains a great name—

MARIAN. You said it all before—I see now! Oh, you will not send me to jail?

CHARLIE. (*Coldly*) Oh, there is no danger of jail if that is all you fear!



PHOEBE. (*Hugging* MARIAN) I'd like to see him!

FROIDEVEAU. (*Kindly*) Sir, it is not for us to be angry when our wives help us in the only way they know. It is for us to show them a better way. I know this lady would be equal to it, for she is clever indeed.

CHARLIE. I hope you don't think that anything in my attitude would suggest to my wife that such practices—

MARIAN. (*Drying tears indignantly*) Charlie!

PHOEBE. Seems to me, Mr. Youngwife, you're not very thankful for her help. If my butcher—ahem! Why, even the agent isn't so hard on her!

FROIDEVEAU. (*Laughing and rubbing hands*) And he won't be either after a while. As for me, really, the little changes are done so deftly (*Examining* MARIAN'S coat again) that if the lady ever wishes a position in our alteration department, let her come to me. I assure her the salary of the best workers is good. (*Laughs*) Never has the firm of Robinèt et Cie. had a greater compliment, and my business methods too—except when some other ladies have done this also! (*Laughs*) For I have discovered it is not firms who do this thing, but the ladies. And do I take them to jail? Ah! (*Throws up hands scornfully*) It is but natural ambition that moves them, and I fix it so they will always get a Robinèt after that. Madame, let me present you! (*Extends coat he has brought. MARIAN shakes head, and drops into chair. He drops in on her lap.*)

CHARLIE. By no means!

FROIDEVEAU. Did I not come to you for advice? You would not let me get into the swindling suit with Rosenblatt.

CHARLIE. My clients. But that is no reason.

FROIDEVEAU. No, it is an obligation. We pay a lawyer for advice. Besides, Madame's talents! Ah, she has at the same time convinced society of the importance of her husband (*Digs* YOUNGWIFE in ribs) and impressed on all the ladies at the reception the importance of the firm

of Robinèt et Cie. (*Sticks thumbs in vest armholes, throws out chest, struts. Gets serious*) Surely, my dear fellow, you can see where the poor child thought it worth while: you can think of some profit you reaped from her fine dressing—a case received—a client—

CHARLIE. Unfortunately, yes. This case! (FROIDEVEAU *laughs consumedly, slaps knee. PHOEBE joins him softly at first, then loudly. CHARLIE finally sheepishly joins in. Then MARION smiles dismally, wipes tears, and caresses coat on knee.*)

CHARLIE. (*Seats himself beside her*) Well, my darling, I must seem a hard-hearted wretch. (*Puts arm around her*) You certainly did try to help me, and I thank you, for you took a big risk. (*Laughs—she hides face*) But please don't try that way again. (*Kisses her. FROIDEVEAU prepares to go, takes hat*) As for the coat, Froideveau, please take it away. (*Extends it to him*) I can't bear to see it. The other is much more suited to our circumstances—and it shall have the right name of Cheap and Skimpy in it. (*MARION screams softly and draws away from him*) Perhaps I ought to have paid more attention to my wife's needs in the line of clothes—

PHOEBE. (*Stepping back through portieres*) Huh! I should think so!

MARION. (*Moans*) Oh, I can't wear it with that name in! (FROIDEVEAU *nods to her and starts for door.*)

CHARLIE. And I'll try in the future to do so. Here, come back, Froideveau, I insist. We can not afford a Robinèt—

FROIDEVEAU. And Madame's beauty and taste can not afford a Cheap and Skimpy! It rejects such crude ornamentation! And, when Madame wears this true Robinèt, it will be such advertisement for our coats as will fully compensate us. I will charge the coat to advertisement. (*MARION rises and approaches PHOEBE at portieres.*)



PHOEBE. Now, and that's that!—(*Aloud*) Dinner's ready, ma'am—(*To MARION softly*) Just you take that coat, never mind what mister says. The agent, he knows best.

CHARLIE. What did you say, Phoebe?

PHOEBE. I was just a-sayin' the dinner will be burnt to a cinder if it ain't served right off. And, I'd like to say—I need that other coat. (*With a broad smile*) Mrs. Youngwife says my coat is a disgrace. My friends don't know nothin' about Rubberneck (*FROIDEVEAU shouts*) so I won't be in no danger!

MARIAN AND CHARLIE. Phoebe!

FROIDEVEAU. That is one advantage of being the maid, Phoebe.

PHOEBE. Well, come on, please, and talk it over during dinner. The soup's gettin' cold.

CHARLIE. Ah, Froideveau, be our guest—

MARIAN (*Wails*) Oh, Charlie, we've only got—

PHOEBE. Pork roast, but I've made chicken salad out of it!

FROIDEVEAU. Ha, ha! A Cheap and Skimpy Salad—I hope it's as good an imitation, Phoebe. And so we will prove that, in the twentieth century also, ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL!

CURTAIN





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